

NSC BRIEFING

23 September 1953

BACKGROUND PIECE ON EAST GERMANY
(For use in conjunction with OCB report on Germany)

I.

25X1 [redacted] East German Communist leaders may now have decided that they must modify the "hard" course launched at their party congress in July because the tough policy has intensified public discontent and caused many essential brainworkers to flee to West Germany.

A. Party boss Walter Ulbricht is said to be planning a central committee plenum for mid-October to formulate measures which would ease restrictions on travel of East Germans to West Germany and would slow down the drive toward full socialization.

1. He plans to accomplish this if he can without fanfare in an effort to play down the direct contradiction with the strong measures adopted at the July congress.

B. The Communists are already taking some steps to induce medical men and small tradesmen to remain in East Germany.

1. Some 860 medical doctors have fled to West Germany in the first eight months of this year, approximately eight percent of East Germany's medical force.

2. Doctors with private practices have been promised sweeping concessions; including an end to political harassment, permission to travel to West Germany, university education for their children, and the right to continue private practice

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- (a) These concessions contrast markedly with the recent moves in Czechoslovakia to cut off all private practice of medicine and dentistry.

- 3. The party press has openly admitted that these moves are aimed at stemming the exodus of doctors.

II. Refugees have fled from East Germany at a high rate during the past two months both as a result of the new "hard-line" policies, and because the populace is becoming convinced there is no hope for any real improvement in living conditions.

A. Flights to the West reached a peak during the eight days ending on 2 September when some 4,330 refugees fled to West Berlin; the total dropped sharply the following week, however, to some 3,100 and has since remained at approximately this level. During roughly the same period, more than 1,800 have escaped each week over the interzonal border directly into West Germany.

- 1. This brings the refugee total this year to almost 150,000; more than two million have fled since mid-1949.

B. It is the quality and not the quantity which gives this current exodus its particular significance.

- 1. In August alone some 1,500 professional persons (educators, physicians, scientists) fled to the West.

- (a) This is more than double the number in this category who fled in August 1957.

- (b) Moreover, the drain of military-age youth continues; more than 10,000 had escaped through West Berlin during the first 8 months of this year.

- C. East German security forces throughout the country have a top-priority assignment of preventing would-be refugees from getting near the borders.

III. We believe that switching to a more conciliatory course would not win any popular support for Ulbricht's regime.

- A. If he slows the drive toward socialization, he is likely to create popular demands for genuine liberalization--demands which might not stop at a Gomulka-type solution but could grow to insistence on German reunification on the basis of free elections.
- B. If travel controls are relaxed, this would only result in a swelling of the ranks of the refugees.
- C. Since more liberal policies are not likely to change popular attitudes, the ultimate recourse will probably be a swing back to a regime harsher than ever to control East Germany's restive population.